



Lowell's Acre Urban Revitalization and Development Project

Lowell, MA

Located along the Merrimack River 30 miles northwest of Boston and home to an estimated 105,000 residents, Lowell, Massachusetts was the nation's first planned industrial city and surged to prominence during America's Industrial Revolution. The city's prosperity grew throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and floods of immigrants came to Lowell seeking opportunity. After World War I, Lowell, like most northern industrial cities, slid into decline as manufacturing companies migrated to southern states. Decades of disinvestment and decay followed. Almost completely developed, with historic industrial buildings standing adjacent to high-density residential neighborhoods, Lowell was faced with a critical shortage of land and the modern industrial space needed to attract job-producing businesses to the area.

Lowell's downward trend has since been reversed, thanks to major restoration projects undertaken by the city. Assistance from EPA came in the form of a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Pilot grant that enabled assessments on areas of suspected contamination that had long been underused. Sites assessed by the Pilot—including three former textile mills and an ash dumping ground—went on to leverage more than \$70 million in funding for a new ballpark and a sports arena that together created more than 450 full- and part-time jobs. In recognition of these efforts, EPA helped select Lowell as a Brownfields Showcase Community in March 1997.

Showcase Communities are selected by the Brownfields National Partnership to demonstrate that through cooperation, federal, state, local, and private efforts can be concentrated around brownfields to restore these sites, stimulate economic development, and revitalize communities. Showcase Communities serve as models for broad-based cooperative efforts to support locally based initiatives. Showcases receive up to \$400,000 from EPA for both environmental assessments and to support the loan of a federal employee to the Showcase for up to three years. Showcase Communities receive additional financial and technical support from the Partnership's more than 20 federal partners, depending on the community need and program eligibility.

Through a coordinated effort as a Brownfields Showcase Community, the City of Lowell has been able to bring stakeholders together to leverage assistance and develop a community outreach process in a large-scale plan to restore one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. Traditionally a place where immigrants first settle in the city, the Acre neighborhood has a poverty rate of more than 42 percent and lies within federal Enterprise Community boundaries. More than 40 percent of the buildings within the 113-acre planning area are deteriorated, in need of major repair, or unfit for human habitation. The diversity of individual site ownership, irregular lot sizes, and obsolete street patterns made it highly unlikely that this area would ever be redeveloped through the unaided efforts of private enterprise.

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A former brownfield in Lowell, Massachusetts.

JUST THE FACTS:

- Lowell's Acre neighborhood has a poverty rate of more than 42 percent and lies within federal Enterprise Community boundaries.
- Through implementation of a restoration plan supported by local, state, and federal partners, Lowell will create developer and investor opportunities and new jobs while increasing the tax base and protecting the environment.
- The Coalition for a Better Acre hopes to rehabilitate as many as 500 homes in the neighborhood, build 150 new residential units, and reach 50 percent home ownership within 20 years.

Sites assessed by Lowell's Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot—including three former textile mills and an ash dumping ground—went on to leverage more than \$70 million in funding for a new ballpark and a sports arena that together created more than 450 full- and part-time jobs. EPA helped select Lowell as a Brownfields Showcase Community in March 1997.

In January 2000, Lowell received approval for the Acre Urban Revitalization and Development Project Plan (Acre Plan) from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Developed with input from local community development corporation Coalition for a Better Acre, the Acre Plan includes: direct intervention through the use of eminent domain for construction of public improvements, and to assist private economic development; adoption of economic incentives to redevelopment; public infrastructure modifications to improve traffic conditions and public safety; rezoning to make land uses more compatible; implementation of housing incentive programs presently utilized by the city; and a mechanism to dispose of publicly held properties for private redevelopment. The city estimates that the overall cost of the plan will exceed \$60 million. Half of these funds will be appropriated by the State of Massachusetts and the other half by the City of Lowell. The city is committed to raising this money through city funds, bonds, and other state and federal programs.

The Acre Plan will first attempt to relocate several commercial and industrial properties to make way for a planned middle school and a new parking garage. The city anticipates that many of the area's properties will require assessment and cleanup before redevelopment can proceed. For assistance, the City Division of Planning and Development helped to assemble local, state, and federal agency support that includes:

- Funding from EPA's Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot (awarded prior to the Showcase Community);
- A \$500,000 EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Pilot;
- EPA Region 1 technical assistance for a community advocate, to assist the city in setting up public meetings regarding the impact of the Acre Plan's implementation;
- A \$2 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Lead Grant for housing within the target area;
- A \$70,000 Brownfields Environmental Health Initiative grant for community education from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry;
- \$1 million from the National Park Service, to create a walkway along the canal;
- A \$3 million Social Services Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- \$1,080,000 from a federal Supportive Housing Program;
- \$6 million from HUD's Section 108 Loan program;
- A \$1.3 million Job Training grant from the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS); and
- \$18 million from the State Education Department for school construction.

The City of Lowell has always stressed job creation as part of brownfields restoration, having passed an ordinance requiring that no less than 30 percent of all workers hired for cleanup and construction be local residents. UMASS Lowell, in partnership with the Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund, is administering a NIEHS grant for a three-month job training program called Environmental Justice on Brownfields Sites (JOBS). Funded at \$390,000 annually, the program will prepare students for entry-level positions in hazardous waste removal, general construction, and environmental sampling and monitoring of contaminated sites. The Coalition for a Better Acre hosted 25 meetings for potential students for this program, wherein community organizers went door-to-door to spread the word about the program's availability. The program is expected to have produced 93 graduates by the end of 2002, with a 90 percent job placement rate.

Through implementation of the Acre Plan and the support of its local, state, and federal partners, the City of Lowell will create new opportunities for developers and investors while creating new jobs, reducing poverty, increasing the tax base, and protecting the environment. The Coalition for a Better Acre hopes to rehabilitate as many as 500 homes in the neighborhood, build 150 new residential units, and reach 50 percent home ownership within 20 years. A new grocery store has already been built on a former brownfield within the Acre, one of the first successful redevelopment projects in the area.

CONTACTS:

For more information on EPA's Showcase Communities, contact Tony Raia of OSWER's Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment at (202) 566-2758

Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>